

VIGNETTES OF
POTENTIAL
ACTIVITIES

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Since general management plans are intended to provide policy guidelines and direction for managers, they do not describe specific projects. This section contains several ideas of the types of infrastructure development and programming activities that may take place under the general management plan for the Boston Harbor Islands. The vignettes show the flavor of potential projects that could emerge over time. Decisions to implement any of these ideas would be determined by the Partnership and the agency island owners.



MAINLAND GATEWAY

From the dark subway a few steps away, visitors emerge into the sun and the wind of the mainland gateway to the harbor islands. Among the festive flags and kiosks, an electronic sign flashes the gate number for the next passenger ferry. While some vendors peddle souvenirs of the Boston Harbor Islands, others offer tours to the outer islands and coastal lighthouses. Several people duck into a provision shop on the pier for sunscreen and a last-minute snack for the voyage. It will take about 30 minutes to reach the island hub, and the salt air induces hunger.

A bus discharges its passengers, a church group from one of Boston's far-flung neighborhoods. The group unloads its picnic baskets and sets them next to the gangway, ready for the ferry's "all aboard" call. With some time to spare before the next ferry, the youngest members of the group explore a nearby park. They climb the "ratlines" of a ship-rigged jungle gym to catch a glimpse of the next ferry coming in to the gateway. A brief time remains to wander, and neighborhood youngsters mingle with international visitors who had explored Boston's Freedom Trail the day before and are now ready for a harbor trail.

Several people speaking an Asian language need directions to the boat to Salem; they have heard much

about the 18th-century China trade and want to visit the Peabody-Essex Museum and historic wharves. Choices abound: A half-day visit to one island. A full-day visit to three or four islands. A two-hour excursion around the islands with a park ranger describing the sights. Or, a coastal voyage to Salem today and to Quincy tomorrow.

BOAT EXCURSION TO THE BREWSTERS

For some people, their first Boston Harbor Island experience is a "visual visit." Passengers had to book this trip several weeks in advance, since this special boat is much in demand. The former fishing vessel, built in 1948, was modernized for the comfort of 20 passengers. It contains early navigation equipment, which the captain demonstrates. Modern telescopes mounted on deck give close-up views of nesting egrets and cormorants on Middle Brewster and basking seals on the rocks of Outer Brewster.

Passengers board this small excursion boat and motor out to the farthest islands, the Brewster islands and The Graves. A ranger aboard the boat explains the stories behind the island names. She tells the lore and history of these islands, starting with geological history of the glaciers and the drumlins created by the glaciers. For centuries before Europeans arrived, American Indians used the islands; their oral tradition suggests that the islands and surrounding waters were favored for fishing and clamming, and shell middens found on several of the islands in recent years reveal more evidence of Indians' way of life. At the Brewsters the ranger talks about some of the people of the early 20th century who occupied these far outposts – some who built summer homes on Calf Island, lobstermen, and quarry-men who took up residence for several months a year. And, there were the many military men who manned the batteries of Great Brewster, defending the coast during World War II.



For a morning's excursion, the group has gotten a view of most of the Boston Harbor Islands and gathered a verbal picture of this park and its many historical and natural resources. Next stop is the mainland gateway where passengers make plans to board the next ferry out to explore one of those islands on foot in the afternoon.

ISLAND HUB

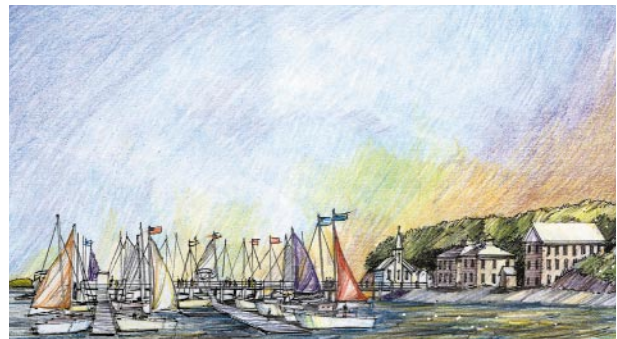
Ferries from downtown and the North Shore and South Shore converge on Spectacle Island, one of several island transportation "hubs" that support the Boston Harbor Islands national park area. Most passengers are beach-goers escaping the heat of the urban land just a mile away. They've come primarily for a day at the beach, but before heading for the changing rooms one family stops at the visitor center to check on the exhibits and get oriented to the park. Next visit, they will take a water shuttle to explore another island, but this day they want to map out their itinerary in advance.

Inside the visitor center, they also view a short film about the park and listen to a ranger describing the sea glass on display. The collection of glass was assembled in the 1980s before the island was "rebuilt" with fill from the Central Artery. There's a small retail store selling park-related items. Another park guide is gathering a group to tour some of the experimental alternative energy projects being tested on Spectacle Island. The group is too large for each member to use an electric bicycle (powered by solar batteries), so most board electric carts and meander up the south drumlin to view windmills close at hand.



But the beach awaits, and the family walks to the changing rooms, complete with lockers and showers, and then they rent an umbrella and beach chairs. For beach-goers, this is the best beach in the area, newly replenished with sand, on the leeward side, safe for swimming, and large enough to accommodate everyone who arrives by ferry and still not seem

crowded. Spectacle Beach is still one of the better-kept secrets of Boston Harbor Islands national park area. The landscape itself is dramatic, with the highest point in the harbor, five miles of pathways, environmental artwork, and a variety of plants for erosion control and scenery. The pier with small kiosks and an adjacent marina keep this a lively place throughout the day. At night, a floating restaurant at the pier, which specializes in New England seafood, serves dinners by reservation. It's one of the "enticements" to the Boston Harbor Islands, and it also generates revenue for the park, as does the marina. This island has become a real hub of the expanded park system.



MARINA

Several islands have marinas for sailboats and small powerboats. Since a recent issue of *Sail* magazine touted the charms of the Boston Harbor Islands, the marina has been nearly full all summer.

A family of sailors arriving from Maine reserved a berth several weeks in advance. The first thing they notice on the dock is a sign welcoming them to the park. They are greeted by a dockmaster when they land, who also orients the family to the island, but recommends that they stop in at the visitor center for a real orientation. They plug into an electric outlet and hose down their vessel from its two-day coastal trip before setting out on an island hike. As they walk along the path, they begin to get a picture of this island park by the signs and artifacts on display on the way to the visitor center. A ranger greets them and leads them to a group that is just setting out to explore the old fort. After the ranger-led walk they return to the cafe, next to the marina for a late-afternoon snack. They will have dinner in a restored building of the old fort.

Meanwhile, in a berth adjacent to the family is a Viking longboat-like "pulling boat" outfitted with three sets of oars and occupied by half a dozen rugged-looking youth who appear to be camping out in their unusual craft. The family of sailors meets the "Vikings"

and learns that they live across the bay in Boston and have been doing an Outward Bound program at nearby Thompson Island. Their challenge this week has been to be fully self-sufficient living on their boat with only a single land stop – at this marina. The stopover is designed for the crew to present a planned interpretive program for other park visitors about island life and survival skills. Clearly these urban teenagers have met the week’s survival challenge and leave their audience impressed with their outdoor skills.

The sailing family from Maine spends a second day on the island in order to explore the more remote and undeveloped west side of the island. They join a group that has just come over by ferry for the day. Their stopover at the Boston Harbor Islands marina turns out to have been more interesting than most marinas. It had rangers, exhibits, and a diverse group of people, all of whom seemed to find interesting adventures.

KAYAK RENTALS

Of several modes of visiting the Boston Harbor Islands – ferry, excursion cruise, small powerboat, sailboat, or kayak – the kayak trip may require the most forethought and planning. Typically, reservations are required several days in advance. At or near the gateways, rental shops are equipped with all manner of contemporary gear, instruction for a safe outing, and education in the natural history of the islands and concepts of island stewardship. Day-trippers learn some natural history of the islands from a knowledgeable kayak guide.

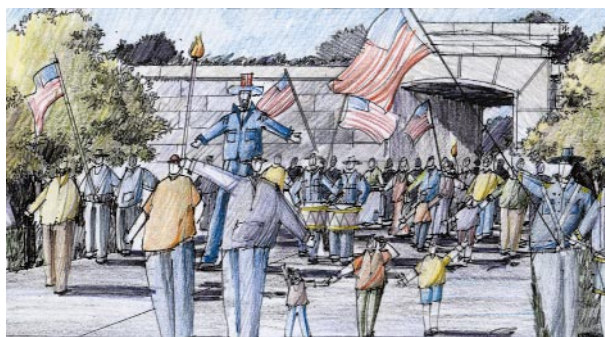
The kayak kiosk is a seasonal tent complex, erected each spring. It includes changing rooms, restrooms, equipment displays, and racks for kayaks, wetsuits, and life preservers. The renter’s package includes a full complement of equipment, a short training session on kayak safety, an experienced guide, and a day of kayaking.



Being in an active, working harbor with greatly varying water depths, changeable currents, tides, and wakes from large vessels, the private kayak outfitters require renters to be accompanied by a guide for safety reasons, unless they can meet requirements set by the park and the kayak rental concessionaires. Qualified kayakers can make up their own itinerary among the islands through established water trails marked either with buoys or on a waterproof paper map available at the rental kiosk. The water trails are carefully planned to avoid major shipping channels. When paddlers beach their crafts to explore the islands, they do so knowing the places of least impact on the island.

Kayak rental outfitters are small businesses selected by the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership to provide this service to park visitors. The rental fees schedule is approved by the Partnership, and a percentage of the profits go back into the park’s special fund for resource protection.

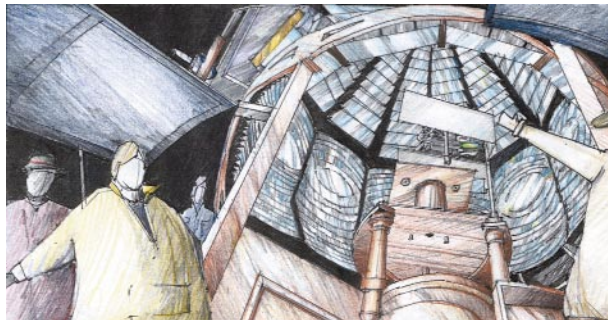
HISTORICAL PAGEANT



An early-evening boat takes visitors to George’s Island for a pageant of history and entertainment for this twice-weekly event. On the boat, performers play music, juggle, and tell stories, while costumed actors speak “in character.” Visitors disembark onto a festively decorated pier, and make their way to the dining area where a New England clambake begins. Diners watch the sun set while listening to roving musicians. As the sun sets, the crowd is ushered into the granite fort to witness a 19th-century “musicale” featuring a small ensemble of string instruments accompanied by singers performing Civil War-era songs and dance numbers. As darkness descends, the theatrical pageant begins, the dramatic history of Boston Harbor and its islands unfolds. The pageant depicts the broad themes of history accurately with charm and humor. Children and adults alike enjoy the

remarkable march through time. Throughout the presentation, multiple photo-collage slide projections illuminate the fort background with historical images and dramatic lighting. Giant puppets and a lively soundtrack add to the spectacle. The pageant concludes in dramatic fashion with sounds of cannon fire, exploding mines, marching soldiers. Delighted and exhilarated, the crowd is guided back to the ferry for the 45-minute trip back to the mainland.

LIGHTHOUSE TOUR



A water shuttle drops a group of 15 visitors off at Little Brewster Island. After disembarking on the new floating pier, the group is met by a uniformed member of the U.S. Coast Guard and a park ranger, who are serving as tour guides. This two-acre island of bedrock is the home of Boston Light (1716), site of the first lighthouse built in the United States, and the last to remain staffed. After introductory remarks by the guide, the group walks along the pier, past a boathouse on the left and to the keeper's house. A generator shed has been converted to a museum, where a visitor can get a close-up look at lighthouse artifacts, such as a Fresnel lens, several types of foghorns, and historic photos of the keepers' families who lived on Little Brewster in the past.

Visitors learn about the life of a lighthouse keeper and imagine how a child growing up here would have seen the world. After leaving the house, visitors stroll along the walkway to the lighthouse. It stands 102 feet tall, intact after more than 200 years, and recently refurbished. The tour guide asks which members of the group are prepared and able to make the somewhat rigorous climb to view the lens close-up. Only five visitors are allowed at one time, and flat shoes and good physical condition are necessary prerequisites. It is a narrow spiral metal staircase with two small ladders near the top. And then, standing near the top—between the huge second-order Fresnel lens and a wall of glass—they take in one of the most spectacular views in Boston.

The Coast Guard guide explains the keeper's duties

and the mechanics of maintaining the light. The first group returns to the base to get to know Sam, the lighthouse dog, while another group makes the climb.

After about an hour on Little Brewster, the group walks back to the pier to board the excursion boat for the return trip to downtown Boston. Sam and his master for the day bid farewell and wait for another excursion to arrive in the afternoon.

CONFERENCE CENTER

From the shell of an old fort, a conference center complex has been created for groups and individuals seeking an island getaway close to home. They come for meetings and retreats from urban life, and they come partly because they know that this development is constantly seeking better techniques for making use of the Earth's materials with minimal depletion; "sustainable technology" is the shorthand. The rehabilitated structures contain modern amenities with emphasis on renewable technology. Solar power supplies more than half of the energy needs, graywater is recycled for a native plant nursery, and a range of waste disposal methods is being tried. Conference participants have come to expect moderate comfort, yet are willing to take part in experiments that will inform us all of better ways to avoid misusing our resources.

Visitors have come to see the conference center as a recreational village with themes of American Indian culture, island environmental studies, and marine science and technology. A portion of the "village" is an artists' colony offering a retreat for quiet work. There is a range of accommodations—from a youth hostel and a bed-and-breakfast inn, to full-service conference center facilities. From downtown Boston, a ferry trip takes 45 minutes and brings day-trippers along with overnight visitors. The center is fully active in three seasons, and even operates through the winter at a low level.



HISTORIC FORT PROGRAMS

After disembarking at the island pier, visitors are greeted by a uniformed guide who provides a brief orientation and then leads the visitors through the fort, giving them a history of the fort. She is a retired Navy lieutenant who volunteers on this island and brings some of her military experience into her narrative. She points out the functions of individual buildings and structures. Next to many of the buildings and structures are signs with historical photos showing a much different view than the one seen today. The fort was used during the major wars of the past century until World War II when it housed nearly 1,000 military personnel, including prisoners of war. Without the historical photos, one has difficulty visualizing the large gun emplacements, which were formerly located in now empty tracks.

Visitors then enter a small exhibit room of the fort where more photos of the structure and the soldiers who lived and worked within are displayed. Along with the historical photos are poster-size excerpts from soldiers' journals or diaries. Playing in the background is period music from the heyday of the fort, interspersed with actors reading excerpts from the soldier's journals. A large map of the island shows the location of the fort and the island in relation to other island defenses. A final exhibit involves craftsmen working with period tools to demonstrate construction techniques used in building this fort. Although most visitors have no first-hand experience of military life, the exhibits intrigue them and prompt them to investigate the full range of Boston Harbor fortifications that can be seen on the islands.



CAMPGROUND



The ferry from the South Shore is filled with campers and their gear. One group of four young women has extended their visits for the Hull High School 10th reunion to camp on an island offshore from their childhood homes. They are amazed at the diversity of the campers they meet on the Boston Harbor Islands – a couple from Sweden, a family with three young children from Oregon, a boy scout troop from New Hampshire, and many people from neighborhoods of Boston.

Campsites are scattered in three areas of the island, all nestled next at the edge of trees and a field, on gently sloping ground. Amenities are minimal – a tent platform, potable water, vault toilets, a stone cooking grill for each site. People expect to rough it and usually come for two or three days at a time.

The young women from Hull chat about their high school days, when the islands had only a few campsites, and getting here took considerable planning. This time it was easy – many more islands to choose from, inexpensive reservations via internet, a short hop to the ferry pier where boats were constantly departing and arriving, and equipment rentals right at the pier.

From this campsite, there's a spectacular view of the ocean beyond three other islands. When the day visitors leave the island, a ranger comes round to invite the overnighers to a campfire program. There will be ghost stories drawn from these islands – a specialty of one summer ranger who otherwise is a drama teacher in a midwestern college. The program is a hit with the campers, who despite ghoulish tales, feel secure and safe on the island as they make their way back to their campsites. The night sky is exceptionally clear and the families from Boston remark on how rare it is to see such darkness.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING VESSEL

A science program developed for students has turned into one of the most popular activities for visitors in general, and two new vessels have recently been added to the “fleet.” Twice a day passengers board this laboratory boat to troll the harbor. They take water measurements, analyze data, and draw in samples from the benthic layer, or the harbor floor. Science experiments are far from dull on this vessel. The program covers water quality, meteorology, navigation, and marine biology, although each excursion may focus on just one of these areas. Instructors are graduate students from the one of the many universities in Greater Boston.

Some of the passengers volunteer to put on fishermen’s attire to help spread and haul the net. Others remain dry inside the cabin. The haul on this trip includes half a dozen skates, two small crabs, plenty of varieties of seaweed, and some harbor muck. Each find gets examined, its role in the ecosystem explained, the bottom muck tested for metal content, and the living creatures shortly returned to the water. Meanwhile another group of passengers drops thermometers and records water temperatures at various depths. Salinity and clarity of the water are also tested.

When all the experiments are run and results recorded, the boat motors over to its island base to deliver the data. Passengers debark for a brief tour of the island laboratory, which is the headquarters for environmental monitoring in the harbor and on the islands. The captain signals her departure and starts the final part of the program, the use of navigational instruments. Today’s excursion group not only gets to view the boat’s radar and new global positioning device, but is present for an extended ship-to-shore conversation with a tugboat bringing a tanker of liquefied natural gas to Chelsea. Back at the gateway pier, passengers are thanked for their work, and reminded that the Boston Harbor Islands website is the place to check to keep up with environmental monitoring.

